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A G A I N S T

**Prophane Swearing:**

Preach'd at

*St. Margaret's Westminster.*

October the 6th. 1700.

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By *Christopher Wilson*, A. M. Lecturer of  
*St. Margaret's Westminster.*

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Publiſh'd at the Request of the Principal Inhabitants.

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TO THE  
GENTLEMEN

Of the Vestry of  
*St. Margaret's Westminster.*

GENTLEMEN,

**I** Cou'd be entirely satisfied to want some Apology for this Publication of the following Discourse; and cou'd willingly undergo all the Censures of Invidiousness for Preaching as well as Printing it, if the Commands of God and Laws of the Land had had their due effect upon either Magistrate or People, but when both are equally culpable, and one Sins permissively as much as t'other does overtly, the burden of Reformation lies altogether upon the Clergy, and we must be accounted Fools for God's sake that we may be wise.

The Supream Authority has in part vindicated it self by enforcing Laws against Prophan Swearing, and appointing Four Solemn Days in the Year, for promulgating the New Law, and God Almighty may still put into their Hearts a more effectual way for suppressing wholly this contempt of his Divinity, but till the Wisdome of Parliament shall finish this hitherto Imperfect Attempt; we of the Holy Ministry must labour against Wind and Tide, and ought as much as in us lies make good the

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## The Dedication.

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*Deficiency of Secular Laws. O may the Eternal Fund of Scripture and Reason have such a Glorious Blessing as to consummate the Work!*

*The Day in which I preach'd this Sermon, Authoriz'd the Subject in a more particular respect, and Your Irresistable Commands not to say Pressing Importunities Publish'd it.*

*I have had frequent Instances of your Love and Respects to me, but I cou'd not foresee you wou'd needs let the World know how well dispos'd you are to accept of small Performances, otherwise I shou'd have made a more studied Acknowledgment of my Gratitude; but be it as it is, I can more easily account for the Preaching, than either You or I for the Printing it, tho' a Good-natur'd Reader may see, that the general Good of Mankind was the occasion on both sides of this particular Opportunity whereby I own my self,*

Gentlemen,

Your most Affectionate and

most Obedient Servant,

*Christopher Wilson.*

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*The Pattern of a Holy Life: A Sermon Preach'd before the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen. Decem. ber the 10th 1699. By Mr. Wilson*



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I

A

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MATTH. V<sup>34</sup>.

*I say unto you swear not at all.*

**T**HIS and the Two following Chapters contain Christ's Divine Sermon on the Mount, in which he vindicates the Moral Law from those erroneous Glosses, and false Interpretations, which the *Jewish* Doctors had put upon it; Teaching Christians a Righteousness and Wisdom much exceeding that of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*; an instance of which, we have in the Case before us.

By the Third Commandment God prohibited all vain Swearing, and Profane use of his Holy Name: But this Commandment the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* had made of

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none

none effect by their Traditions. They taught, That provided Men abstain'd from Swearing fallſly, and from mentioning the expreſs Name of God in their Oaths, notwithstanding this Commandment, they might lawfully Swear, even in ordinary Converſation. From this Doctrine, the Common People took a liberty of Swearing by the Name of Created Beings, as by the *Earth*, by *Jeruſalem*, by their own *Heads*, and the like; tho' this was in effect, no leſs a diſhonouring of Almighty God, than if they had expreſſed themſelves by his Holy Name.

For Swearing by that Holy Name, being a ſolemn Invocation of Almighty God to Atteſt the truth of what we affirm, and by which we own God's Infinite Knowledge, Truth, Juſtice and Power, as of One who knows the ſecrets of all Hearts, is himſelf the Word of Truth, Juſt and Powerful in retributing for Affronts done to his Honour: Then he who Swears by a Creature, either aſcribes thoſe afore-mention'd Divine Attributes to that Creature, which is the groſſeſt ſort of Idolatry; or elſe (if he means any thing) he Swears by the God of that Creature which he then names, and which has a dependance on, and a relation to God, according to the Words following my Text; *Swear not by Heaven, for it is Gods Throne, i. e.* It has a twofold Relation to God being his Creature, the Work of his Hands, and being his Throne, the chief Seat of his Majeſty: And more expreſſly, *Matt. 23. 21, 22. Whoſo ſhall Swear by the Temple, ſwareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that ſhall Swear by Heaven, Swareth by the Throne of God, and by him that ſitteth thereon;* and ſo by the ſame Reason, he that Swears by any Creature, Swears by the Creator of it,  
and

and by that fulness of the Deity which is thereby relatively invoked.

Now the Name, or Being of God is so Sacred, that we do not only Profane it when we mention it upon any trifling occasion, but even when we have an undecent recourse to any such things as relate to it. But this way of Swearing by Created Beings, was found out by the Dogmatizing *Jews*, as a Salve for common Swearing; and a pretence to indulge that Sin, which in the dregs of an Age not much unlike ours, was so universally spread, that being partly curb'd by the intermixture of *Roman* Power, and partly to make the way of Profelytisme something smooth (as the *Jesuits* do by Indulgences at this day in *China*) they wanted either Authority or Will to suppress it. And by this Invention they had corrupted the genuine Sense of the Third Commandment, which prohibited all Swearing in ordinary Conversation, and all manner of Profane Invocations whatsoever. Therefore our Blessed Saviour vindicates the Sense of the Commandment from their erroneous Comments, and plainly asserts, that those customary Oaths, which they made use of, were so far from being Lawful, that it was Sinful in ordinary Conversation, even to Swear at all. *I say unto you, Swear not at all.* In Discourfing upon which Words, I shall proceed in this easy Method,

First Explain the Text, and then enforce the Obligation it lays upon all Christians; whereby I shall

I. *Shew you the Nature of the Thing here forbidden.*

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II. *The*



*II. The Reasons of the Prohibition.*

In *English*, as well as in *Greek* and *Latin*, we have one Word for two very different Things; for to *Swear*, signifies either to Swear *solemnly* and *lawfully*, or, to Swear *profanely* and *unlawfully*.

To Swear Solemnly and Lawfully, is to Swear upon a serious, conscientious, and solemn Occasion, when lawfully called thereto, that is, when the Law of the Land, or the Eternal Law of promoting the Glory of God requires it.

To Swear Profanely and Unlawfully, is to Swear upon any light, inadvertent, or carnally passionate Occasion,

Our Blessed Lord, does not seem to have any regard to the first of these, which being a Negative Proposition, and not in this Passage asserted, we must fetch our Arguments not only from the Words before us, but elsewhere; and what I have to offer for it, will not I hope, be look'd upon as a Digression, I wish the number of Gain-sayers was so small that it cou'd be thought so.

First then, By this Passage it can never be prov'd, that our Saviour speaks here of *solemn* and *lawful* Swearing; No, tho' it be by Invoking the Sacred Name of God himself. For 'tis plain, that our Saviour by this, and that other Passage in the 23 Chapter, complains of the Hypocrisy of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* upon this Article of Swear.



Swearing ; they had corrupted the Law, it seems, by two Traditions; 1. That to Swear by a Creature was not so dangerous as to Swear by God himself, which seems to be the occasion of this Passage. 2. That to Swear by some certain Created Beings, was of less concern to their Consciences than to Swear by others, which is the Subject of Discourse in the 23 Chapter.

The latter of these does not come under our present Consideration.

The Question between *us* and the *Euthusiasts*, is, Whether by this Prohibition, all Solemn and Judiciary Oaths are expressly forbid ? But this does not appear.

For our Saviour by these Words, *Swear not at all*, does as much forbid Swearing by Created Beings, as by the Name of God himself ; and we can't suppose, that to Swear by *Heaven*, by the *Earth*, by *Jerusalem*, and by a Man's own *Head*, were the Forms of such Oaths as Magistrates requir'd.

Furthermore, to give Oath by way of Publick Testimony, is a thing that is not in its own Nature evil ; for if it were so, it had never been Lawful or permitted under the *Old Dispensation*.

That it was so, cannot be deny'd ; and the Intrinsic Nature of the Thing remaining, the Moral Reasons for it still continue under the *New Dispensation*.

Now it being a Moral thing, that a Man by the most binding and solemn Expressions shou'd assert a matter of Truth, when so requir'd, and which must be to the  
Injury

Injury and Damage of either the Common-wealth, or some particular Member ; it cannot be suppos'd, that our Blessed Saviour shou'd wholly forbid it ; this not being any part either of the Ceremonial or Judicial Law, properly of the *Jews*, but belong'd to the Moral Law of Mankind in general, which had no other Origination than the Light of Nature, and that binds us *Christians* as much as it did the *Jews*. And so far was it from being an Immoral Thing, that we find God Almighty himself in many places of the Scripture, confirming by an Oath what he saith to Men, *Gen. 22. 16. By my self have I Sworn, saith the Lord.*

So that God was the Example of it, and not only so, but he establish'd the Form of it, *i. e.* of Swearing by no other Name than of himself. So that a Solemn Oath being a Reverential Thing, and doing the greatest Honour, and acknowledging the Dignity, Sacredness and Inviolableness of the Thing, or Person Sworn by (*therefore, saith the Author to the Hebrews, 16. 13. because God could Swear by no greater, he Sware by himself.*) Then to Swear directly by any thing but God is Idolatry, or Sacrilege, such as we cannot suppose any holy Man, such an one, for instance, as the Patriarch *Joseph* to have been guilty of, *Gen. 43. 32.* He who kept himself from being defil'd so much as by eating with the *Egyptians*, cou'd not be guilty of Swearing by *Pharaoh* ; but *by the life of Pharaoh*, was an Intentional and Relative Swearing by God himself. *Ita vivat Pharaoh*, was it seems, a customary Asseveration of the *Egyptians*, and signify'd neither in the Form nor meaning, any more than this, May God so preserve the King, as what I say is true : So *Elisha* the Prophet Swears to

to *Elijah*, *As the Lord lives*, and *as thy Soul lives*, which was as much as to say, as God is, and as his Power and Goodness preserves thy Life, &c. *2 Kings* 2. 2, 4, 6. So that the intention of these Expressions terminates upon God, and all this was Swearing relatively by God himself, which in the *Form* of it, was an Act of Religion. So the Idolaters made it when they Swore by *Baal*, *Astarte*, or any false God. And so *Caligula* design'd that a Religious Worship shou'd be paid himself thereby, and that he shou'd be esteem'd a God, when he Commanded the *Jews* to Swear by his Name: For which Reason, *Josephus* tells us, those of *Alexandria* refus'd to obey, and the Primitive *Christians* wou'd not Swear by the *Genius* of the Emperor, but by the *Safety* of the Emperor, they Swore without scruple, when call'd to give Evidence; that belonging properly to God; whereas, if the *Fortune* or *Genius* of the Emperor was any thing, as *Origin* boldly and bravely argues, it was a *Demon*.

There might be divers Instances brought out of the Old Testament, of holy Persons such as *Abraham* and *David*, making use of Oaths upon great and serious Occasions; but to conclude this Argument, It cannot be suppos'd, that *St. Paul* was either ignorant or unmindful of these Words of our Saviour, and yet we hear him saying, *Rom.* 1. 9. *God is my Witness, whom I serve with my spirit.* And yet more plainly, *2 Cor.* 1. 23. *I call God for a record upon my soul.* And when he was about to confirm the *Galatians* in the belief of what he wrote, *Gal.* 1. 20. he says, *Now the things I write unto you, before God I lye not.* And you may see it likewise, in the Example and Practice of an Holy Angel, that came down from



from Heaven, *Rev. 10. 6. And swear by him that liveth for ever and ever.* And yet after all this, it must be confess'd, that our Blessed Saviour has plainly suggested, that the Dealings of a Christian ought to be so upright and sincere, that he shou'd never have occasion to require or make use of an Oath, that his Conversation shou'd be Plain and Honest, and his Affirmation, or Denial shou'd carry as much force with it as the most solemn Oath. Tho' it is likewise as evident from the Reasons which I have given, that an Oath is allowable in Cases of necessity, where it may be a means of obliging the Person concern'd to speak the Truth, and where a Controversy cannot be otherwise determin'd; but then an Oath is never to be requir'd, but when that necessity is apparent, nor to be given, but when the business is of some great moment: Nothing can justify an Oath, but Religion or Charity, when either the Cause of God or the Good of my Neighbour is concern'd; nay, and even then, and in such Cases, the Person who Swears ought not to do it rashly, but with such Reverence and Decency as becomes the Exercise of all Religious Actions, as I have shown this to be.

I come now therefore to a farther Explanation of the Text, To enquire into the nature of an Oath, what it is. I speak of such Oaths as too many Men ordinarily use in Conversation, as when they Swear by Almighty God, by his Blessed Son, by the Wounds of his Sacred Body, by the dear Blood of his Cross, by his precious Death, by Heaven, by the Sacrament, or the like; what meaning and acceptation among Men such Invocations have, what they amount to, and in what sense

sense they are taken at least, if spoke in none at all. Why the meaning in short is this ; by such an Oath, and such an Invocation, they Imprecate all the Evil which can possibly befall them in reference to that thing which they then mention, by the Power of that God to whom the thing has Relation ; for to Imprecate from a deaf, dumb, or senseless Creature, can have no meaning at all.

But every thing we say, must have a meaning ; it will have a meaning whether we will or no ; and whether we thought of it or no, when we said it, yet we must assign a meaning in the Great Day of Judgment, when Men must give account for every idle Word ; let 'em think it never so insignificant when they said it.

Well then, if a Man Swears absolutely and directly by the Holy Name of God, the Case is plain, and the meaning is, that he then requires God to Revenge the Dishonour done to his Holy Name, supposing he mentions it to an Untruth.

Thus far therefore, the very *Scribes* and *Pharisees* durst not tempt God.

But then the Swearing by some Created Beings, was, as they took it, quite another thing, especially, if it was a Being from which they could not fear much mischief : let the Words shift for their own meaning, they could keep themselves out of harms way, if the thing they Invok'd, or Swore by, had neither Ears, nor Eyes, nor Hands.

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The *Jews* were not willing to Swear by the *Life of Cæsar*, we are told; No, it was not only acknowledging him to be a God, which notion terrify'd the more Religious amongst them; but the *Emperor* had a great many Eyes and Ears in every Corner, and a long Hand too; and if they profaned his Name by a Lye, they were sure to smart for it. 'Twas safer therefore to Swear by *Heaven*, they did not much fear that falling upon their Heads; or by the *Earth*, that was *terra firma*, and like to stand mute; or by *Jerusalem*, that had a great sound and fill'd the Mouth, but cou'd signify just nothing in an Oath, no more than the *Temple* that was to stand as sure as Heaven till the *Messias* came, and then they wou'd learn a new Lesson. But hold a little, to Swear by the *Gold of the Temple*, that might be dangerous, a Judgment might come upon that; the *Romans* watch'd for all opportunities of fingering it; and to Swear by the *Gift of the Altar*, might be as bad; it wou'd give People a Disgust, and by such a Profanation People wou'd come to *abhor the Offering of the Lord*: Here was rare Casuistical Divinity! Well then, to prevent all dangers, a Man may be bold with his own, and Swear by his own *Head*, that wou'd never revenge upon it self, and thus onward.

But now here comes our Saviour's Interpretation of these Oaths, *Heaven* is God's *Throne*, and the *Earth* his *Footstool*; and thy *Head* is not thine for these uses, *thou canst not make one hair white or black.*

And



And this is not all; but let us consider farther, As all Created Beings are of God, and belong to him, to Swear by any of 'em is a Relative Oath by the Maker of 'em; and to Swear by *Heaven*, is to Swear by all the hopes thou hast in Heaven, which are all depending upon the pleasure of God; to Swear by the *Earth*, is to Swear by all the Blessings of the Earth, and to Imprecate all the Calamities that can on Earth befall thee; to Swear by *Jerusalem*, or the *Temple*, is to Swear by all the Profession of thy Religion, and to Imprecate all the Curses due to an Apostate; and to Swear by thy *Head*, is to Swear by thy own Life, and to Imprecate from God a sudden Death; so when any one says, *As I live I will do so, and so*; or, *I'll pawn my Life on it*, it signifies, if what I now say be not true, I provoke God to cut me off. Thus every Oath of what sort soever, has Reference to God, awakens as it were his Attention, solicites at his Mighty Throne, and importunes him for Justice; Ay: and as if it wou'd confine him withal, to such and such methods of Judgments.

This is the Nature of Swearing; this is the inevitable meaning of it; these are the formal and final Causes of it; which was the first thing I undertook to Consider: I come now in the

Second place, to enforce the Obligation which these Words lay upon us Christians; and to shew the Reasons of this Prohibition.

From what hath been said it appears, That there were some Oaths used amongst them in ordinary Conversation,

sation, which cou'd not be of the same Form as the Solemn and Judiciary Oaths were; for they were such which the *Scribes* did not allow to be binding upon the Conscience of him that us'd 'em: Now if our Saviour forbids those sort of Oaths; and St. *James* after him, *James* 15. 12. as positively as others of a more solemn Form; it is plain then, that our Saviour forbids Swearing in ordinary Conversation at all.

And the Heinousness of this Sin will soon appear, to any considering Man.

- I. Neither Table of the Law does so much as suppose any such thing among the *Jews*, as *Speculative Atheism*; but the first Three Commandments which are Negative, provide against all the Irreligion which they are capable of, who confess a God; to wit, *Superstition*, *Idolatry*, and *Practical Atheism*; ascending in this very Order.

I. *Thou shalt have no other Gods but me.* Thou shalt neither Fear nor Honour either the Sun or Moon, or any other Creature, in Heaven as the *Heathens* did; which Worship of theirs, was properly *Superstition*, *Δεισιδαιμονία* a fear of *Demons*, or other Gods beside the Supream, who cou'd with-hold Benefits, or inflict Mischief upon them.

II. *Thou shalt not make to thy self any graven Image, &c.* This provided against *Idolatry*, Thou shalt not make to *Worship* any Image or Similitude, either of the Supream God, or of any other God, *Demon*, or *Heroe*.

III. *Thou*

§ III. *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.* This provides against the highest Point of Irreligious Custom, even *Practical Atheism*; for whilst thou professest God in thy Heart, thou must not deny his Attributes in thy Conversation, as if he cou'd not hear thee when thou dost Invoke his Name to an Untruth; as if he had no sense of his own *Honour*, but will suffer himself to be call'd upon on every slight, and sometimes profane Occasion; as if he wanted either *Wisdom* to distinguish between Acts of Religion and Profaneness, or *Power* to make good his Threats

So that the Object of our Religion being on all sides secure, nothing remains of the First Table, but to promote the proper Overt-acts of Worship, and making them a constant and perpetual Duty, by fixing Solemn Days of Exercise.

This then of taking the Name of God in vain, is a Sin of the most Heinous Nature, and not so little and slight as frequent use has made that and some other Sins of the deepest colour seem to be; and we are particularly warn'd of it by a *Denunciation* annex to the Commandment, that we may apply our selves to consider how great a Guilt the breach of it brings.

II.

All Sins are of a direct as well as consequential Nature injurious to *God*, our *Neighbour*, or our *Selves*; and whatever Sin is directly so, in all these Three respects; that sure, is of the Blackest Order of Sin, and deserves a place in the lowermost part of Hell. This



This Sin of Profane Swearing may then above all others sure challenge that Prerogative.

For in the first place, It is directly against *God*.

We cannot sin directly against God any other way possibly, than by dishonoring his Holy Name; we cannot molest him, nor grieve him, properly speaking; for to *grieve* God, or the Holy Spirit of God, is a Metaphorical Expression, for repulsing him, it is only a more Pathetical Idiom of Speech: We cannot lessen his Happiness, nor diminish his Perfection, nor deprive him of any Attribute, nor alter his Counsels, nor resist his Decrees; all that Mankind can do, is to Dishonour him in the Face of the World, all the mighty Giants and *Nimrods*, the stout and mighty Swearers, and monstrously great Blasphemers, can't make one step up against Heaven; but they can Dishonour God in the sight of Men, in the Sphere of this World, which must pass away and come to nothing, and so the Dishonouring will at last come to nothing: But the Common Swearer, as much as in him lies, directly Affronts the Majesty of God, insults him in the *Person* of the *Father*, *The Lord thy God*, by breaking the Third Commandment; Affronts him in the *Person* of the *Son*, by kicking against this express and positive Precept of my Text; defies him in the *Person* of the *Holy Ghost*, by spitting upon the Sacred Altar of Holiness, and quenching the Coelestial Fire of Divine Love, of which, he who has but one Spark, can never be so cold, stupid, and senseless, as to offer Indignities and to grieve a *Comforter*.

*Second*

*Secondly*, Such a one not only *consequentially* (of which I cou'd give many Instances) Injures his *Neighbour*; but he *directly* wounds him, and that in the tenderest part of all his Soul.

I know of no direct injury, can be done to any Man, which does not break that Serious and Universal Rule, of *Doing as one would be done by*. And he is the greatest Transgressor in that respect, who makes the deepest and most frequent Impressions of uneasiness upon a Man's Mind. Now the frequent Swearer cannot have any just Ideas of the Prickings, and Woundings, and Rackings of a good Man's Mind, when he hears the Name of God so Profan'd; but if he would consider a little, he must needs think, that a good Man had much rather hear himself callumniated and bespatter'd, then hear his Holy God, his Dear Saviour, Crucify'd afresh. It don't trouble a Man's Conscience to hear himself revil'd, if he has given no occasion; but it wounds his Conscience, to hear his God Profan'd, when 'tis in his power to restrain the Insolence, by *Informing* against the Offender; and if to avoid the Cheques of Conscience, he does *Inform*; he neglects his Affairs, and discomposes his Mind, and suffers Reproach; this is indeed the easiest part of the *Dilemma* to get over, but 'tis directly injurious to any Man, to put him upon it; to force him either to sin against God, or to sustain some worldly Damage. Nay, Dishonour he must inevitably sustain, every true Believer is affronted and dishonour'd, despis'd and vilify'd, call'd *Raca* and Fool, that hears his God Profan'd; he that Swears lightly, or Profanes, in a good Man's

Man's hearing, calls that good Man *Sot* and *Ideot*, either to believe in such a God, or *Dastard* and *Coward*, not to vindicate his Honour.

*Thirdly*, The Common Swearer, Sins directly against himself: All Sins which are directly Sins against the Transgressor's own self, are such as are more injurious to him than to any body else.

Now, tho' this Sin of Common Swearing, is highly Dishonouring God Almighty; and it seems, as if it was levell'd intentionally against none but him; and tho' at the first letting fly, it likewise scandalizes and grates upon a Man's Neighbour, yet withall, it so immediately recoils upon the Offender, that he himself is the first who receives a Wound by it.

And how great a Wound does that Man give himself, who exposes his own Weakness, and brandishes his Folly in the sight of all Mankind! Some People sound a Trumpet of their own *Praises* in the World; but this Man blows a Trumpet of his own *Disgrace*; is not satisfy'd to have low and mean Notions of God, but he must let every body know the gage of his Capacity, when a great Oath must stand Surety for his Truth, and Curfes like so many *Asterisks* in his Discourse; As in imperfect Authors, where Words are wanting, there are so many black studds, as who shou'd say, here's a vacancy of Sense. And surely, if a Man shou'd study to affront and injure himself, he cannot do it more effectually, than by showing the emptiness of his Understanding, in never having any serious Thought about him, and the nakedness



ness of his Heart, the very Seat of all filthy Ingratitude; where all Benefits, and Mercies, and Kindnesses receiv'd are digested into Rottenness, and in the foulest Eructations, flung out against his Benefactor: How otherwise, shall we express the making a *Mock*, or a *By-word* of that Holy Name, by which Heaven and Earth is Blessed!

On the contrary, if a Man has any sense of Gratitude, of Love, of true Faith, of Reverence towards God Almighty, our Great Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, our Lord, our King, our Master, our Father, our Friend! If any Tenderness or Good-nature, any Civility or Good-breeding, any Honesty, or Humanity towards our Neighbour, any regard of Credit, or sense of Shame towards ourselves; if a Man wou'd be thought capable of thinking of these Things, he must all at once for ever abandon this Sin; I say, all at once, without looking about for any *Excuse*, or *Extenuation* whatsoever.

Nor can I see, how this Sin can any way in the World, be either *Excus'd* or *Extenuated*; seeing it is one of those, to which, there is no *Temptation*. We are prompted to commit most other Sins, either by some inward Lust or Passion; or by some outward Advantage, which may accrue thereby. But the Common Swearer, can pretend to none of these Inducements; he can no more pretend to any Pleasure, Profit, or Honour by this Sin, than that he has any Natural Appetite or Inclination to it. No: It is a Sin that Nature even in its grossest Corruption and Depravity never pleads for: The Lustful Man, accuses the Heat of his Constitution, which every little spark of Beauty can put into a Flame; the Drunkard alledges, the importunities of Acquaintance, or the Conversation of Companions, who wanting natural Facetiousness, are forc'd to Brew it between themselves

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by the help of Drink, and so out comes the Froth. If the Ambitious Man climbs up Precipices, 'tis to get above the World; and the Pleasure of other Peoples Dread, will, he thinks, compensate for his own Danger. If the Covetous Man denies himself the very Necessaries of Life, he can say this for a Pretence, *viz.* That he is contented to want to Day, rather than be afraid of wanting to Morrow. But the Common Swarer, is the only Sinner without Temptation, and without Excuse; that Damns himself for nothing, and receives neither Pleasure, nor Advantage from his Sin; nay, this Sin is more unaccountable than *Perjury*; for a Man may be tempted to Swear falsely for lucre's sake, in hopes to maintain himself by it, or to raise his Fortune; but no Man ever purchas'd much by *Common Swearing*.

So that all the Pretences of Pleasure, Credit, and Advantage, being wrested from this sort of Sinner; he has but one left, he has nothing, I can think of, that he has to say for himself, but that he is *Possess'd*; he is under the Power of the Devil, and can't help it.

Well, let us then Consider, What sort of Possession this is; In what Figure does the Devil actuate him? Why, in that of Passion; And is this the mere effect of Passion? Does such an one in the Tumult and Disorder of his Animal Spirits, lay hold on this as a support? must Nature in her Convulsions, have recourse to Oaths and Curses for a Relief? will they set the matter right, when she is wrong'd? do they calm her, when she is provok'd? secure her, when she is surpriz'd? conduct her when she is bewildred? If none of all this, than how can it be Passion? This is but a Pretence, and can no other way be accounted for, than that Men in a Passion don't know what they say; this brings it to mere Folly,

Folly, or Senselessness; and they are accountable still for that Passion which bereaves them of their Sense, and transports them from a Fear and Reverence of God, into an Extatic and Diabolical Defiance of Almightyness.

And then perhaps, 'tis such a familiar Spirit, as pretends to *Custom* and *Habit*; a very strange Pretence, after all: For, Why don't such Pretenders break off that Custom? Why don't they endeavour to leave, and study to Reform, and at last totally eradicate that Vicious Habit; which they may easily accomplish, with Care and Diligence; let 'em not say, they can't help it, or cannot reform it; for what will he do in compliance either with God's Command, or with his own Eternal Happiness, who will not labour to quit a Vice, which is so expressly forbid by Christ; and to which he has no other Temptation than Custom? How can he hope to overcome his Lusts and Vices of Sensuality, which are often excited by strong Temptations from without? How can he hope to deny himself in point of Wealth, and Power, and Honour, or to embrace Death or Bonds, rather than forfeit his Integrity, who will not forsake a groundless Sin, a Sin without any natural Appetite to suggest, and without a Temptation to excite it? For this is a *Custom* wherein Nature is not concern'd, and an *Habit* that doubtless wou'd very easily be cured, and quickly laid aside if Magistrates and other People wou'd do their Duty, and put the Laws in Execution. But to wave such Pretences: I shall proceed to lay before you some of the *Causes*, why this Sin is so much in Use.

And the greatest of all, must needs be a want of due Reverence to the Name of God; and this from a want of Faith, the general Cause of all Sin; and therefore not to insist upon that which is common to all, a more pe-



culiar Cause is *Vain-gloriousness*; it is such a Noble Qualification to speak Dreadfully, it shows so much Courage and Manliness not to be afraid of sinning, to Swear is something extraordinary in Discourse; it serves instead of Tropes and Figures, it is the highest sort of Rhetorick *and it is,* and distinguishes a Man, tho' not from the faces of the People, the dregs of the Mob, for they have an ancient Liberty and Property to it; yet it sets a Man at a distance from the Wary, Conscientious, and Religious part of the World: Why, if it were not for this sort of Dialect, one might be mistaken for a Sober and Grave Man, and one that pretends to think of Heaven; if a Man don't Swear and Curse, you'll expect him to be Sincere, to value his Word, and keep his Promise, and such Things as are below a Man of very brisk daring Parts.

But all the Tribe of Common Swearers, are not so abandon'd in their Principles, or profligate in their Pretensions. Some addict themselves to this Habit upon a quite contrary Motive, they fancy Oaths and Execrations, give a *Credit to what they say*, and make 'em much sooner believ'd than plain and cool Expressions. But this is a stupid and senseless Imagination; for it has a quite contrary Effect upon all their Speech; as it contradicts the very End for which they Sin, it has a direct tendency to bring a Discredit upon whatever they shall speak; for every one knows, that no Man's Word is so little regarded, as that of a Common Swearer's, and the binding and confirming what he says, with Oaths and Execrations, very much lessens the Credit of it; For what Credit can be given to that Man's Word, who has so little Fear and Reverence of God, as to have no Esteem or Regard for his Oath? it rather blasts his Credit, and ruins his Reputation with all Serious and Judicious Persons.

A Man can never enough enlarge upon the Unreasonableness of this Sin; and what I have said, has, I hope, in a great measure shown the Folly and Heinousness of it.

And now much Reason have we of this Sinful Nation, to expect God's heavy Judgments upon us, where this Sin is become so Universal; how much then does it concern all those who love the Gates of *Sion*, and the Peace of *Jerusalem*, who are truly affected to the Church and State under which they live, to endeavour as much as in them lies, in their several Stations and Callings, to put a stop to this Outragious and Spreading Sin, which has render'd us obnoxious to God's Vengeance.

I pray God, that those who are directly Guilty, wou'd timely and seriously apply to themselves all that I have said; there is but one great *Use* to be made of it, which is a *Sincere and Efficacious Repentance*. In order thereto.

I shall first in an uncommon way of Application, Address my self to those who are guilty of this Sin, tho' they never practis'd it; who shall at least, henceforward incur the Guilt, unless they make it their concern, as much as in them lies, to stop the Torrent of this pernicious Inundation.

*First*, To those who by God's Providence are placed in a Publick Station, and whose Charge it is, *To be a Terror to evil doers*. Every Publick Officer and Magistrate, is God's *Steward* in the Government of the World, to whom God has committed the management of those Affairs which fall under his Jurisdiction, or within his Sphere; and from whom God expects that he shou'd see his Holy Interest advanc'd, and that Religion and Piety, be duely Exercis'd and Promoted. Let them therefore seriously consider, that when ever by their Negligence or Default, Sin gets ground, and Religion is discourag'd; they

they are unfaithful to that Trust which God hath committed to them; for which he will one Day require a very severe and dreadful Account.

Let such consider, that there are Laws Ordain'd against this Sin of Swearing, that there are not only *Old Laws* still in force, But *New Ones* made against it; which they have been *this Day* reminded of, and that they are made the Administrators of those Laws; when therefore, they neglect to punish an Offender, they are not only unfaithful to their Charge, but they are themselves so far consequently guilty, as by conniving at this Sin, they give occasion for it to spread and increase; by which the whole Realm is obnoxious to God's heavy and speedy Judgments. From these Considerations, it highly becomes you impartially to punish all Offenders in this kind, and by all means possible to discourage and deter them: And on the contrary, by your countenance and favour to encourage and commend Sober and Religious Men, make Sobriety and Vertue a Qualification for Preferment; and Profaneness and Wickedness a bar and stop to it. Not that the total extirpation of it can be effected by the *Magistrate* alone, without the concurring endeavour and assistance of all Good and Sober People, to whom, I do now in the

2. *Second* place Address my self. Let such consider, That the Wisdom of the Nation has made Laws for the total extirpation of this Crying Sin among us.

The Law has *Honour'd* every Good Man with a *Power*, it has call'd and invited every One to accept of that *Honour*, and as that Invitation is on God's behalf, take heed how you neglect such an Opportunity of serving God. Remember the Obligations of your Baptismal Vows, to stand up for the Honour of God, to be Christ's faithful Soldiers and Servants, to fight under  
his



his Banner and maintain his Cause against all Adversaries.

There is perhaps a *Nominal* Invidiousness cast upon this Religious Office, but there is a *real* Honour in performing the Duty; a Duty that has been practis'd by the most Honourable Men in Sacred as well as Prophane Story, one instance to go no farther is enough to make you despise all Reflections, by the Example of *Joseph* the Patriarch, *Gen.* 37. 2. he who was the Chosen of God, and so Venerable in Sacred Story, fear'd not to *Inform* his Father concerning the evil Deeds of his Brethren. But in this matter before us, there's no place for so much as Invidiousness, when it is consider'd, that ye do not hereby publish any Man's Failings as all other *Informations* do, because the guilty Person is himself the Publisher in this Case, and first proclaims his own Infamy.

And now, They who notwithstanding all that has been said, shall be asham'd of bearing this part of the Cross, let 'em remember his Words, who bore it all in its whole weight, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this Adulterous and Sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the Holy Angels.*

A Word or two is necessary in the *Third* and *Last* place, to those who are *directly* guilty in the practice of this Horrid and Foolish Sin.

Such shou'd seriously consider with themselves, the Infinite Greatness and Glory, and Majesty of that Name which they Profane and Blaspheme; consider that it is a Name to which every *Knee does bow, of Things in Heaven, and Things on Earth, and Things under the Earth*; that it is a Name which the Angels of Heaven for ever Admire, Worship, Bless and Love, which you so vulgarly use and trifle with; that it is a Name which the Cherubs and Seraphs, Thrones and Dominions, and all

all those Celestial Inhabitants never mention but with the profoundest Reverence, and most humble Veneration, which you daily Blaspheme by horrid Oaths, and execrable Imprecations; and consider, that it is the Name of the Great God of Heaven and Earth, who is ever present to the stillest Whispers of your Souls, and greatest Secrets of your Hearts; He that is withal a jealous God, and will not suffer such Indignities and Contemptuousness towards his Divine Majesty to go unpunish'd. In short, if you ever hope to Laud, to Magnify and sing Eternal Hallelujahs with all the Host of Heaven, *to him that sits upon the Throne and to the Lamb for ever*, let your Practice be consistent with your Hopes, and qualify yourselves for those endless Enjoyments, by setting *a watch before the door of your Lips, that you offend not with your Tongues.*

I beg leave to add to all that I have said a few Expostulations.

I cannot understand that a Common Swearer has any manner of Principles, but let them be what they will I'm sure his Practice is inconsistent with 'em.

Art thou a *Jew*? read the Commandment, *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.*

Art thou a *Deist*? Know that God is to be honour'd, and that all mankind look upon Common Swearing, and all other Prophaness of Speech to be a Causeless, an Unjustifiable, and a Publick dishonouring of the *Supream Being.*

Art thou an *Atheist*? Be asham'd of affronting or at least imposing upon all mankind, by Invoking and calling to witness what thou dost not believe to have a Being.

Art thou a Senceless, Unthinking, Incurable Thing? Keep it to thy self.

But art thou a *Christian* after all, a Disciple and Servant of Jesus Christ? Then attend to the words of thy Blessed Master, *Swear not at all.*

FINIS.

